

Review Article

MUSLIM PARENTS' RELUCTANCE TO SAVE FOR CHILDREN'S TERTIARY EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA: CAUSES AND REASONS

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Abstract

This study aimed to identify the reasons and causes for the reluctance of Muslim parents to save for children's tertiary education despite Islam encouraging the practice of saving money for the future. Additionally, this paper also identified the main sources used for current enrolled college children. A set of questionnaires had been used as the instrument to gather information needed. The respondents of this study were Muslim parents whose children were studying in public higher education institutions in Malaysia. Only 752 questionnaires were considered as completed and usable for analysis. Items in the questionnaires were adopted from Ipsos Public Affairs and adapted according to the suitability of the study. The study employed descriptive analysis including frequency and percentage. The findings showed that all respondents acknowledged that Islam encourages them to save money. The study also proved that T20 and M40 groups were focusing on other saving priorities rather than on children's education. Unlike the previous group (T20 and M40), the B40 group declared that they did not have enough money to save for their children's tertiary education. B40 also expected that scholarship or financial aid would be enough to cover the cost. Furthermore, since respondents did not have savings for tertiary education of children, they used a variety of resources to finance their children's education. For T20 and M40, parents, their income and savings were used as the main sources for current enrolled college children. For the B40 group, the main sources were children's study loans, current income, scholarship and others. Some B40 received zakat to cover the cost of education. All parties should play their role to make better education possible. In conclusion, the public should be encouraged to save money as early as possible to ensure enough savings in the future. The government should step up with more campaigns and activities to encourage the society to save. Some suggestions to encourage individuals to save more in education were also made.

Keywords: Muslim, parent, reluctance, tertiary education, saving, children

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INTRODUCTION

Education is an important element that can drive individuals, society and the country towards a better future. It is also considered as the appropriate medium to attain the progress that one wants to accomplish in order to achieve health, wealth, happiness and wellbeing (Hartog & Oosterbeek, 1998; Kumar & Ahmad, 2007; Nawi, Jamsari, Hamzah, Sulaiman & Umar, 2012; Swiatek, 2017; Zakaria, Tajudeen, Nawi & Mahalle, 2014). To enable Malaysians to get a good education, the education system is built based on two elements, namely the pre-tertiary and tertiary education level. The former ranges from pre-school to secondary school while the latter includes certificate, diploma, undergraduate, as well as postgraduate studies. To meet the goals of the Malaysian Ministry of Education's (MOE) target of 53 percent access and enrollment of tertiary education by the year 2025 as stated in the Malaysian Education Development Plan 2015-2025, all public and private higher learning institutions have started to offer various programs to cater to the demand.

Like other countries, Malaysia is also experiencing rising costs for education especially in tertiary education (Benjamin, Marathamuthu, Muthaiyah & Raman, 2011; Hadi, Hussin, Muhammad, Razak, Mahjom & Ahmad, 2019). In line with that, the London-based Expert Market survey ranked Malaysia as the fifth most expensive country for higher education. In addition, Malaysia is also concluded as the country with the lowest fee rates

from the top 10 most expensive places for tertiary education (Mustafa, 2017). As an alternative, Elliot, Song, & Nam (2013) and Elliott, Lewis, Grinstein-Weiss, & Nam (2014) proved that savings play an important role prior to the enrollment of children in any higher education institutions. Savings can help the children to get the quality education and able to reduce the burden of parents.

From the Islamic perspective, all Muslims are encouraged to save, and saving is considered as a noble practice. In relation to that, Allah has mentioned the importance of saving in the Holy Quran as follows:

The king (of Egypt) said: "I do see (in a vision) seven fat cows whom seven lean ones devour – and seven green ears of corn, and seven (others) withered. O ye chiefs! Expound to me my vision, if it be that ye can interpret visions." (Surah Yusuf, 12:43)

"O Joseph!" (he said). "O man of truth! Expound to us (the dream) of seven fat cows whom seven lean ones devour, and of seven green ears of corn and (seven others) withered: That I may return to the people and that they may understand." Joseph said: "For seven years shall ye diligently sow as is your wont: And the harvests that ye reap, ye shall leave them in the ear – except a little, of which ye shall eat. Then will come after that (period) seven dreadful (years), which will devour what ye shall have laid by in advance for them – (all) except a little which ye shall have (specially) guarded." (Surah Yusuf, 12:46-48)

The above Qur'anic verses explained the Prophet Joseph's interpretation about the dream of the king of Egypt. The Prophet (AS) warned him of seven years of calamity exactly after the seven years of abundance (good crops). He also advised him to hold the reserves of corn in granaries during the good years, which were used in the difficult times to overcome the famine of seven years. Related to the explanation of the dream, Muslims (either as an individual or government) are encouraged to have savings during the times of plenty and spending more during the period of shortage (Ahmed, Meera & Collins, 2012). Saving plays an important role to prepare oneself for all kinds of uncertainties in the short and long term.

While Islam encourages savings as a preparation to face any possibilities in the future, Abd. Hadi et al., (2019) found that most of the respondents, especially those who are categorized in low- and high-income level did not have any saving for children's tertiary education even though they are Muslim. Yet, the actual reasons for them not saving were rarely identified. In addition, what are the main financial resources used by parents who do not save money to finance their children's tertiary education expenses? Therefore, this study aimed to identify the reasons and causes for the reluctance of Muslim parents to save for children's tertiary education despite Islam encouraging the practice of saving. In addition, this study also identified the main sources used for current college-enrolled children.

Problem Statements

The expenditures for tertiary education keep increasing over the time. According to Vijandren (2017), Malaysia parents were ranked 8 out of 15 countries, which spent a significant amount of their children's tertiary education. This included university fees, books, transportation, accommodation and others. Meanwhile, Zainal, Kamaruddin, & Saiful Nathan (2009) stated that traditionally, the payment of tertiary education was the responsibility of parents. In the meantime, the practice of saving as early as they can turned out to be the choice of most parents in Malaysia to cover all the expenses of a child's education. However, the findings of this study showed that Bumiputera parental saving was not enough to cover all costs of tertiary education. The findings of Friedline (2012) concluded that low- and high-income groups were more likely to make savings for children's tertiary education than middle-class people. Walsemann & Ailshire (2017) further stated that some parents were involved in debt to finance their children's tertiary education. Interestingly, among debtors, parents who were categorized in high-income had more debt than low-income earners.

There are also other studies conducted on parent saving for children's tertiary education. However, these studies focused more on the factors that influenced parent savings. Among the factors identified as contributors to parenting practices were income (Glick, Sahn, & Walker, 2016), social norms or influence (Dondero & Humphries, 2016), support of related institutions (Castleman & Long, 2013), parent's socio-economic status Kainuwa &

Mohammad Yusuf, 2013), educated parents (Ogundari & Abdulai, 2014), and property ownership (Hortz et al., 2018). Although savings played an important role in the success of the children's education in higher level, not all parents were able to make specific savings for that purpose. Therefore, this study was conducted to identify reasons and causes for Muslim parents who do not make savings despite the practice being encouraged in Islam. In addition, this study also identified the main sources used for current college-enrolled children.

METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study aimed to identify the reasons and causes for refusal of parent to save specifically for children's tertiary education purpose. A set of questionnaires had been used to gather information needed. The respondents of this study were Muslim parents with children who were studying in public higher education institutions throughout Malaysia. Out of 850 questionnaires distributed, only 752 were considered as completed and usable for analysis. All items in the questionnaires were adopted from Ipsos Public Affairs (2013) and adapted according to the suitability of the study. The study employed descriptive analysis including frequency and percentage.

FINDINGS

This section is divided into two parts. The first part discusses the profile of respondents, followed by the the reasons and causes for parents' reluctance to save for children's tertiary education and the third part touches on the main sources used to pay for current college-enrolled children.

Profile of Respondents

The items in table 1 are the information of the respondents involved in the study. All respondents are Muslim. Almost 70 percent of the respondents are males and the rest are female (30.45 percent). Meanwhile, over 85 percent of the respondents were married while 13.96 percent were divorced. In general, respondents can be concluded as educated individuals as more than 60 percent of them were bachelor's degree holders. Respondents with diploma and SPMs were also high at 34.04 percent and 39.63 percent, respectively. In terms of age, most of the respondents were between 41 to 60 years old (96.94 percent) and only 3.06 percent were 61 years old and above. In addition, more than 40 percent of the respondents worked in the private sector and the rest were in the government sector (34.05 percent) and some were self-employed (23.80 percent).

Furthermore, respondents were categorized into three income groups as discussed by Wai (2019). 32.18 percent respondents were classified into the bottom 40 percent of household (B40) with the minimum household monthly income of RM3,000. 31.12 percent were the middle 40 percent (M40) and 36.70 percent were the top 20 percent (T20) groups with total monthly incomes of RM6,275 and RM13,148, respectively.

Table 1: Respondents' Information

| Respondent Profile | Description | Frequency (n=752) | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Gender | Male | 523 | 69.55 |
| | Female | 229 | 30.45 |
| Marital status | Married | 647 | 86.04 |
| | Divorced | 105 | 13.96 |
| Highest education level | PMR | 87 | 11.57 |
| | SPM | 298 | 39.63 |
| | Diploma | 256 | 34.04 |
| | Bachelor's degree | 452 | 60.11 |
| | Master's degree | 44 | 5.85 |

| Age | 41 – 45 years | 187 | 24.87 |
|---|---------------|-----|-------|
| | 46 – 50 years | 197 | 26.20 |
| | 51 – 55 years | 166 | 22.07 |
| | 56 – 60 years | 179 | 23.80 |
| | 61 and above | 23 | 3.06 |
| Job sector | Government | 256 | 34.05 |
| | Private | 317 | 42.15 |
| | Self-employed | 179 | 23.80 |
| Income category | B40 | 242 | 32.18 |
| | M40 | 234 | 31.12 |
| | T20 | 276 | 36.70 |
| Number of dependents | 3 | 157 | 20.88 |
| | 4 | 87 | 11.57 |
| | 5 | 198 | 26.33 |
| | 6 | 288 | 38.30 |
| | ≥ 7 | 22 | 2.93 |
| Do you save for children (tertiary education purpose) | Yes | 106 | 14.10 |
| | No | 646 | 85.90 |

Regarding the number of dependents, almost 40 percent of the respondents had 6 dependents and only 2.30 percent at least with 7 and more dependents. When it comes to savings, more than 85 percent declared that they did not make special savings allocated for the children's tertiary education. Only a small number (less than 15 percent) of respondents did save specifically for their children's tertiary education.

Reluctance of Muslim Parents to save for Children's Tertiary Education: Reasons and Causes

In the first place, this study asked the respondents "Do you acknowledge that Islam encourages saving?" All of them (100 percent) answered "Yes". However, this study showed that less than 15 percent of the respondents purposely saved for the children's tertiary education while the rest did not. Therefore, Table 2 demonstrated the reasons and causes for reluctance of parents to save for children's tertiary education. The respondents were categorized into 3 income groups: the bottom 40 percent of household (B40), the middle 40 percent (M40) and the top 20 percent (T20). Each group was asked to evaluate based on three indications: major reason, minor reason and not at all. For the T20, 88.40 percent considered "I am focusing on other saving priorities" as a major reason. Furthermore, 45.70 percent agreed "I am not sure which are the best options for college saving" was also a major reason not to save. 42.60 percent of respondents concluded "I expect my child to qualify for enough scholarship or financial aid to cover the costs" as a major reason too. Only a small number of respondents determined these items as major reason including "I am focusing on saving for retirement first" (8.90 percent) and "It is my child / children's responsibility to pay for college" (6.40). Moreover, the T20 group identified these items as minor reasons including "I expect my child to qualify for enough scholarship or financial aid to cover the costs" (54.00 percent), "I am not sure which are the best options for college saving" (49.50 percent), "It is my child / children's responsibility to pay for college" (32.90 percent) and "I am focusing on saving for retirement first" (26.40 percent).

In addition, all respondents who were categorized under the T20 group totally agreed that these were not reasons for them not to save. These included "I do not have enough money to save for my

children's college education" (100 percent), "I am concerned that having savings might prevent my child/children from getting financial aid" (100 percent), "I do not expect my child to go to college" (100 percent), "My financial planner told me not to save for college" (100 percent) and "My child will attend a school that is not very expensive" (100 percent). In addition, some respondents also emphasized that these items were also not considered as reasons. This involved "I have not got around to starting a savings plan yet" (97.60 percent), "My children are too young to start thinking about it" (97 percent), "My child is too old/it is too late to start saving" (96 percent percent).

For the M40 group, the study showed that "I am focusing on other saving priorities" (89.60 percent) and "I am not sure which are the best options for college saving" (88.80 percent) became a major reason. Meanwhile, "I do not have enough money to save for my children's college education" (51.80 percent) and "It is my child/children's responsibility to pay for college" (55.60 percent) was considered as minor reason. Furthermore, all respondents in this category mutually agreed "My financial planner told me not to save for college" (100 percent) was not at all a reason not to save. Moreover, more than half respondents agreed that these were also not the reason including: "I have not gotten around to starting a savings plan yet" (52.60 percent), "I am focusing on saving for retirement first" (64.10 percent), "I am concerned that having savings might prevent my child/children from getting financial aid" (72.80 percent), "My children are too young to start thinking about it" (59.00 percent) and "My child is too old/it is too late to start saving" (56.00 percent).

Related to the B40, all respondents agreed that "I do not have enough money to save for my children's college education" (100 percent) as a major reason. This agreement was followed by "I expect my child to qualify for enough scholarship or financial aid to cover the costs" (98.20 percent) and "My child will attend a school that is not very expensive" (65 percent). This group of respondents also agreed that this matter was considered as not at all a reason "My financial planner told me not to save for college" (100 percent). In addition, "I have not gotten around to starting a savings plan yet" (88 percent) also did not become a reason not to save.

Table 2: Reasons and Causes for Refusal of Muslim Parent for Children's Tertiary Education

| | Reasons and causes | T20 (n=215) | | | M40 (n=202) | | | B40 (n=229) | | |
|-----|---|------------------|------------------|-------------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| | | Major Reason (%) | Minor Reason (%) | Not at All a Reason (%) | Major Reason (%) | Minor Reason (%) | Not at All a Reason (%) | Major Reason (%) | Minor Reason (%) | Not at All a Reason (%) |
| 1. | I do not have enough money to save for my children's college education | 0.00 | 0.00 | 100.00 | 46.40 | 51.80 | 1.80 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 2. | I expect my child to qualify for enough scholarship or financial aid to cover the costs | 42.60 | 54.00 | 3.40 | 52.00 | 12.40 | 35.60 | 98.20 | 1.80 | 0.00 |
| 3. | I am focusing on other saving priorities | 88.40 | 2.00 | 9.60 | 89.60 | 9.60 | 0.80 | 25.00 | 28.00 | 47.00 |
| 4. | I have not got around to starting a savings plan yet | 0.00 | 2.40 | 97.60 | 32.60 | 14.80 | 52.60 | 0.00 | 12.00 | 88.00 |
| 5. | I am not sure which are the best options for college saving | 45.70 | 49.50 | 4.80 | 88.80 | 2.40 | 8.80 | 23.00 | 12.00 | 65.00 |
| 6. | It is my child/children's responsibility to pay for college | 6.40 | 32.90 | 60.70 | 16.40 | 55.60 | 28.00 | 12.00 | 24.00 | 64.00 |
| 7. | I am focusing on saving for retirement first | 8.90 | 26.40 | 64.70 | 21.30 | 14.60 | 64.10 | 55.00 | 12.00 | 33.00 |
| 8. | I am concerned that having savings might prevent my child/children from getting financial aid | 0.00 | 0.00 | 100.00 | 12.60 | 14.60 | 72.80 | 36.00 | 56.00 | 8.00 |
| 9. | My children are too young to start thinking about it | 0.00 | 3.00 | 97.00 | 26.00 | 15.00 | 59.00 | 12.00 | 25.00 | 63.00 |
| 10. | My child will attend a school that is not very expensive | 0.00 | 0.00 | 100.00 | 46.50 | 51.30 | 2.20 | 65.00 | 35.00 | 0.00 |
| 11. | My child is too old/it is too late to start saving | 0.00 | 4.00 | 96.00 | 23.00 | 21.00 | 56.00 | 15.00 | 29.00 | 56.00 |
| 12. | I do not expect my child to go to college | 0.00 | 0.00 | 100.00 | 23.00 | 28.00 | 49.00 | 45.00 | 47.00 | 8.00 |
| 13. | My financial planner told me not to save for college | 0.00 | 0.00 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 100.00 |

Main sources for current enrolled College children

Table 3 below showed the main resources used by parents to pay for current college-enrolled children. As discussed in the previous

section, the information presented in table 3 was related to the parents who did not make specific savings to use for their children's tertiary education.

Table 3: The Main Sources Used to Pay for Current Enrolled College Children

| Sources | T20 (%) | M40 (%) | B40 (%) |
|---------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Parent saving | 25.00 | 27.00 | 2.00 |
| Parent current income | 47.00 | 21.00 | 7.00 |
| Parent loans | 2.00 | 19.00 | 9.00 |
| Children's savings | 11.00 | 8.00 | 4.00 |
| Children current income | 10.00 | 6.00 | 19.00 |
| Children's loan (NHEFC) | 0.00 | 8.00 | 26.00 |
| Children scholarships | 3.00 | 9.00 | 16.00 |
| Government financial aids | 0.00 | 1.00 | 9.00 |
| Family contribution | 2.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Zakat | 0.00 | 0.00 | 7.00 |

For those with a high-income level (T20), the primary sources used to fund children's tertiary education were from the parents' current income (47 percent) and followed by parents' saving (25 percent). Only a small number respondents used their children's saving (11 percent), children's current income (10 percent), parent's loans (2 percent), children's scholarship (3 percent) and also family contribution (2 percent). Concerning those with a middle-income level (M40), the main sources used were parent's saving (27 percent), parent's current income (21 percent) and parent's loan (19 percent). Some of them used children's saving (8 percent), children's current income (6 percent), children's loan (8 percent), children's scholarships (9 percent), government financial aids (1 percent) and family contribution (1 percent). In

contrast to the previous two groups of income level, the low-income group (B40) relied on children's loans (26 percent), children's current income (19 percent) and children's scholarships (16 percent). In addition, they also depended on government financial aids (9 percent), parent's loans (9 percent), parent's current income (7 percent), zakat (7 percent), children's saving (4 percent), parent saving (2 percent) and family contribution (1 percent).

DISCUSSION

Based on these findings, we can conclude that the majority of low-income respondents did not make any tertiary saving for their children. This could be due to the lack of funds to be saved. With

the remaining leftover funds from the monthly salary, other requirements needed to be prioritised such as food, clothing, housing and medical needs.

This situation also explains that human needs are different from one another as revealed in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Onchwari, Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008). This theory proposes that people are motivated to fulfill basic needs before moving on to meet higher level growth needs. The lowest levels of the pyramid are made up of the most basic and fundamental needs such as air, water, food, shelter and clothing, while the need for self-actualization and transcendence at the top.

Besides, the big number of children may also make it difficult for parents and guardians to save for tertiary education (Björklund, Anders & Salvanes, 2010). This is different to the high-income respondents; the majority of them did not make any tertiary savings for their children. However, if their children managed to get a place in a tertiary institution, they would usually have enough money to cover all the costs involved. The majority of respondents from the medium income group had made some savings for their children's tertiary education. They seemed to be aware of the increase in education costs for their children and they did have some remaining funds for this purpose. They were also aware that early savings could guarantee that their children or those under their care would be able to acquire tertiary education quite comfortably.

Therefore, parents' current income and parents' saving were the crucial source of payment for current college-enrolled children for those who were grouped in T20 and M40. However, this kind of saving is known as general savings which can be used in the time of emergency. Initially, this kind of savings was not specifically channeled for education purpose. In the end, the parents still needed to use this saving to finance children's tertiary education since they did not have any other alternatives and choices. Besides that, children's loan especially the fund channeled by National Higher Education Fund Corporation (NHEFC) was vital for those who were categorized in B40. Previous studies have shown that some children still needed to work while studying in order to generate some income to finance their study (Biffle & Isaac, 2002; Neill, 2015). This scenario happened for the children in all income groups. Zakat also played an important role to help poor people to gain knowledge at tertiary level.

CONCLUSION

In line with the rising cost of education especially at the tertiary level, saving is seen as a good alternative to reduce the financial burden of parents and children. Islam also encourages one to make savings specially to face any unforeseen circumstances or to meet future needs (Ruth, 2018; Wijaya, Hakim, Saputro & Mulyadi, 2019). Although most respondents did not make savings purposely for children's tertiary education, the findings showed that all respondents acknowledged that Islam encourages them to save. The findings also showed that T20 and M40 focused on other saving priorities rather than on children's education. In addition, the M40 was also not sure the best options for college saving. Unlike the previous group (T20 and M40), B40 declared that they did not have enough money to save for children's tertiary education. B40 also expected enough scholarship or financial aid to cover the cost.

Furthermore, since respondents did not have savings for tertiary education of children, they used a variety of resources to finance the children's education. This will not only help in developing a future generation and enable the children to have a comfortable life when they are studying at the tertiary level (Fang, Huang, Curley & Birkenmaier, 2018; Montacute & Cullinane, 2018). For T20 and M40, parents' income and saving were used as the main sources for current college-enrolled children. For B40, the major source of financing was children's loans obtained from various sources such as the National Higher Education Fund Corporation

(NHEFC), the state government and others. In addition, children's current income also was used to cover the cost of education. Some children who were studying in higher learning institutions worked on more than one job to generate income.

Finally, all parties should play a role in encouraging individuals to save more especially for education. The practice of saving should be started as early as possible to ensure enough savings are made. In addition, the government also plays an important role to encourage people to save. Currently, tax relief privileges are given up to RM8,000 a year under the National Education Saving Scheme. These benefits should be continued to encourage people to save money. Government and relevant institutions need to organize more activities like talks so that the public understands the importance of early saving. Essentially, in line with Islamic teachings, everyone needs to save money as a preparation to face any expected and unexpected circumstances.

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